CHAPTER 14

BROADCASTING IN THE PACIFIC

In his speech to the Ad Club, Tom Lewis described how the Armed Forces Radio stations followed "the sound of the guns" wherever American troops were fighting: on land, on the sea and under the sea, and even to airplanes in flight. In military terms, radio was "on the offensive." It was bringing *"a little bit of home"* to the servicemen -- and it was helping even more to bring servicemen back home.

After three years of effort, the huge wall map at their Headquarters reflected flags that denoted more and more stations in operation. "There's still that soldier, he said, "that Navy man, somewhere not yet reached by any of our efforts. There's still that spot waiting for its transmitter or its receiver. Our job is to find that man and fill that need. [There are] three things we've learned so far: nothing's perfect, nothing's complete, nothing's static. There's nothing perfect in war - perhaps because perfection is peace."(1)

THE MOSQUITO NETWORK

In contrast to AFN-Europe the troops island-hopping across the Pacific had no resources of their own to draw from in establishing radio operations. So, AFRS became more directly involved in setting up stations. The tropical heat and moisture combined to limit the useful life of the radio receivers to about four months, which further exacerbated the shortage of radios among the troops. Finally, the Army developed and sent overseas a compact plastic-sprayed set that was virtually water-proof.(2)

In early 1944 the station at Noumea became the flagship station of what became known as The Mosquito Network of seven stations spread across the Southwest Pacific. Because of the distance that separated the islands, it remained a network in name and perception only. It functioned more as an association of outlets, each providing news, education and information to its isolated military audience.

A station was erected on Guadalcanal following the one on Noumea. It began test broadcasting on March 1, 1945. The station's commanding officer, Captain Spencer Allen, and his crew of two officers and eight enlisted men, arrived on February 15, after going through the training course at AFRS headquarters. Army engineers and Signal Corpsmen erected a twenty- by forty-foot wooden shack in a muddy coconut grove to house the studio and control room. The staff then set up the equipment, which it had brought with them. Power for the broadcasts came from a Signal Corps generator driven by a Jeep motor. After a brief shakedown period, the station went on the air officially on March 13, 1945. It had a normal range of thirty-five to fifty miles, although it occasionally reached out as far as a thousand miles.(3)

Like all AFRS operations, the station broadcast fifteen minutes of the latest news at 7:00 and 8:00 AM each morning. At 12:30 PM, several times a week, chaplains of different faiths gave spiritual talks. The evening broadcast schedule included the standard AFRS transcribed programs. As Captain Allen told a Marine combat correspondent shortly after the station opened, its facilities were available to each of the Services stationed on Guadalcanal. He explained that he planned to keep open a half-hour each night for the different units. Other locally-produced programs included shows by the Red Cross band, concerts, religious services at the memorial chapel and live descriptions of amateur boxing matches held on the island.(4)

A year after the first stations went on the air, Allen became a Major and Chief of the Armed Forces Radio Service, Southern Pacific Bases Command. He commanded the stations on New Caledonia, Guadalcanal, Munda, Bougainville, Espiritu Santo, Nandi and Tutila. Allen observed, "We have completed the pioneering. Broadcasting has become a routine, businesslike procedure. Gone is the haywire. In its place are commercial transmitters and consoles, heavy-duty turntables and recording equipment, professional amplifiers and microphones. We're on the air, hour after hour, on split-second schedules." In contrast to the breakdowns and dead air in the early days of the Mosquito Network, broadcast problems had become rare by April, 1945.(5)

The most important aspect of the Mosquito Network was that it became an integral part of the soldiers' lives, right up there with food, work, training, movies and mail. The listeners came to resemble radio audiences back in the States. Allen explained, "Where once the listener was happy if we played nothing but Harry James recordings all day, now he's a critic. We're downright abused if we clip the last two minutes of the NBC Symphony to join San Francisco [short-wave] for the news, or if we cancel 'Your Radio Theater ('Lux, to you'),' or if we play 'Rum and Coca Cola' too many times. In short, the longer we're in operation, the more conservative and demanding the G.I.s become in their listener tastes. We use the phrase 'comparable to standard American commercial broadcasting practices' to indicate the tone by which the Mosquito Network operates."(6)

THE FIRST "SPOTS"

The Network's primary job was to create good morale which Allen believed the stations accomplished "automatically, just by being on the air with Stateside shows and good local programs." Like commercial stations, the Mosquito Network had information to sell, such as mosquito repellent. A typical spot announcement told the soldiers:

"Are YOU repellent? Yes? Then use Tougours Gai; it keeps the mosquitoes away. Remember, rub it in your delicate skin each evening as the sun goes down. Thank YOU."(7)

The "commercials" and their delivery were every bit as sophisticated as advertisements presented back home. For instance, taking atabrine was essential to avoid malaria in the regions of the South Pacific. Since the soldiers often forgot, the network stations developed a campaign to remind them. On Guadalcanal, the station featured "The Atabrine Cocktail Hour" each evening at 5:30. The program consisted of fifteen minutes of recorded music and contained no direct reference to the taking of atabrine. Yet, the subliminal message came through, as the announcer pretended to bring the listener "cocktail music" from some sumptuous lounge such as the "Fungus Festooned Fern Room" or "The Starlight Roof high atop Hotel DeGink in downtown Guadalcanal." A soldier would listen to find out from where the "Atabrine Cocktail Hour" was "originating." Without even realizing it, he'd hear "atabrine" at least twice, thereby reinforcing the idea that he should take his medicine.(8)

The Mosquito Network stations "unabashedly borrowed" their style of "infomercials" from the most recognizable spots on radio back home. They "advertised" not only to fight mosquitoes and malaria, but also to sell security through silence. The "DT/SMS (Don't Talk, Silence Means Security)" campaign imitated the Lucky Strike "LS/MFT" slogan. It was corny and perhaps even bad radio, but it was effective.

"I defy anyone to find one soldier out of a hundred on New Caledonia who doesn't know that 'DT/SMS' means today," Allen argued.(9)

Information and entertainment were primary products, while each of the outlets also provided news up to fourteen times a day. Mostly they rebroadcast the shortwave pickups direcly from the United States. Although the stations had captive audiences, the motivating idea was to keep the listeners content. Each station tried to provide the same mixture of the news, sports, and entertainment as was broadcast back home. This approach worked as well in the South Pacific as it did in the United States.(10)

The program mixture also worked well with New Zealanders who listened to the Mosquito Network station at Mangere, near Auckland. Early in '44, the New Zealand government gave AFRS a radio frequency to provide information and entertainment to American servicemen stationed in their country. The New Zealand Broadcasting Service (NZBS) provided technicians to operate the station and the Mosquito Network Command sent four qualified enlisted men to service as the program personnel. The station became the southernmost outlet of the Network. It broadcast both the regular AFRS transcription package and locally-produced programs, recorded and live.

While the station existed for the benefit of the U. S. Forces in New Zealand, the Americanized program schedule had an important impact on civilians. In letters to the station, the New Zealanders expressed appreciation for the AFRS programs and for the understanding which they helped promote between their country and the United States. "We feel that we have learned to appreciate your American viewpoint, as perhaps you have done with regard to us 'EnZedders,'" one listener wrote.

The station went off the air in December, 1944, after only eight months of operation. A writer to the *Auckland Star* wrote, "It's been so nice to know you. Parting is such sweet sorrow. You've taught us how to smile, a lesson we so badly needed. The old town won't seem the same when the American station is off the air. Many a radio will want for use when you're gone, mine especially."(11)

THE JUNGLE NETWORK

The Mosquito Network was not the only AFRS operation in the Pacific. In the Central Pacific, the Jungle Network covered the vast territory from the Hawaiian Islands to the Philippines. Given the wide ocean expanse, the Navy, under the Command of Admiral Chester Nimitz, assumed command of the area. As the Army moved onto the islands that dotted the sea, the local commanders began seeking AFRS service for their troops. Their request reached AFRS headquarters in the spring of 1943, and Lewis ordered Boardman to go to the mid-Pacific to plan for station activities.

Departing in May, 1943, Boardman faced the job of convincing local Navy Officers of the need for stations on islands they commanded. Because the islands had both Army and Navy personnel stationed on them, Boardman had to obtain authorization from commanders of both services. He then had to explain to the Navy Command at their Mid-Pacific Headquarters the value of providing radio to the soldiers and sailors in the field. Only after all this effort did he secure a joint working agreement to begin establishing radio stations.

The first broadcast operation began on New Guinea as a joint venture of the United States Army and the Australian Broadcast Company. Located at Port Moresby on the southern coast of the island, the station began operating on February 26, 1944. Australian Captain Robin Wood and U.S. Army Captain Edgar Tidwell commanded a six-man American contingent. In May, Tidwell began the first purely AFRS station at Nadzab on New Guinea. The station signed on the air May 8, located precariously on the side of a hill that at various times was either sundrenched or rain-swept.

While Nadzab went on the air first, Finschaafen, which was operational on June 4, became the flagship station of the Jungle Network. Located in a twenty-by-forty-foot prefabricated hut atop a hill overlooking the Finsch harbor, only a deeply muddied road provided access to the station. Besides the main building, the facility included tents for the enlisted men and officers, and a generator shelter. The studios were practically inaccessible, so the staff produced live shows down the hill in an engineer recreation hall.(12)

By the end of August, Ted Sherdeman, the Jungle Network Commander, had an opportunity to put the operation in perspective. In a letter to Lewis, he detailed the nature of broadcasting in the Central Pacific. His analysis of conditions and philosophy of operation provides an excellent picture of AFRS in the field. He warned Lewis: "Don't, to the slightest degree, wave the flag. It's sure death. I'd suggest you have every script carefully gone over by somebody who's been over here - I mean somebody who's been stuck in New Guinea for a while. The brief inspection trips can't reveal the truths of what men feel in this country. Only those who have lived in it and gone through the loving and hating it can tell whether a script is honest or not. If it isn't honest, if it doesn't ring true to them - they'll jeer it down."(13)

In his concept of operation, Sherdeman saw entertainment as a carrot to draw listeners to the information and education mission of AFRS. "The I & E Section seeks the mental good that comes from men receiving accurate and timely information about the war, themselves, their country and their home. We want to stimulate their thinking about everything from algebra to maintaining a truck. Radio entertainment, as provided by you, is the shimmy dancer in front of our medicine tent. When the dancer is through, we sell the health medicine of the day to the crowd that gathers, just as we sold soap after the last joke at home."(14)

According to Sherdeman, the stations under his command had two missions. First, they would provide the best possible service to their immediate area. Second, they'd serve "the men of the base to the exclusion of all others." To accomplish this purpose, the station commander should contact the base commander or his immediate subordinates at least once each week. He should seek to "discover what problems have arisen that the radio station can help solve, from accident prevention to conservation and security measures. No Commanding Officer of a base has problems which, if they require the cooperation of the enlisted men, the radio station can't help solve. We're proving the radio stations can and do solve problems right along. We gather them in with Bing Crosby and then sell them their atabrine. It works."

Sherdeman believed that the AFRS stations should provide "the best possible service to the theatre command. Theatre problems are a main concern of AFRS headquarters. They prepare scripts and announcements and send them out to each station, specifying the time and day for broadcast."(15)

Following the policies which Lewis had established, no officers appeared on the air except for Chaplains, Base Commanders or General Officers. An enlisted man served as the station's Program Director. He was responsible to the Officer In Charge for all program matters except censorship. In this capacity, he maintained the ideal of AFRS functioning "by and for the enlisted man." The service encouraged the enlisted men at each station to work out their own problems. The Officer In Charge had a role of "guiding but not leading."(16)

Reports such as Sherdeman's helped AFRS improve its service during a time of continual expansion of outlets. To provide additional information, Lewis dispatched Austin Peterson, Chief of the Program Section, to the Pacific. Peterson's reports, in the form of long letters, provide a detailed account of AFRS operations in the Pacific in early 1945.

Peterson's accounts showed how AFRS had become so intimately involved with the life of the troops. On the first leg of his trip, from Seattle to Hawaii, Peterson found that the men's initial contact with AFRS came as soon as they left mainland shores. Aboard the transport ship, a PA system played music from V-Discs, the AFRS music library and transcriptions, sports events rebroadcast from short-wave, and news. Peterson had an immediate suggestion that material provided for transports should contain nothing that would date it or sound "like we're giving the boys old stuff. Phrases like 'Here's a brand new tune' - or, 'high in popularity poll today is 'Mairzy Doats'' should be shunned like malaria."(17)

By the time Peterson reached Kwajalein, he'd come to the realization that AFRS had underestimated the life of its discs. He concluded that "no AFRS disc ever dies - its soul goes creeping from turntable to turntable into eternity. That's why I feel we should survey our smaller shows, make them timeless and just as good listening two years from now as today."(18)

EARLY SCRAPPING FOR PARTS

By the time he reached Saipan, Peterson determined that a serious shortage of radios existed in the field. Early war directives had prevented soldiers from taking radios overseas. That created a problem of a lack of receivers. The Saipan station had distributed 341 radios to hospitals and other strategic listening points on a loan basis, wherein all borrowers had to sign for the sets.

In his letter to Lewis from Manila, Peterson wrote, "Not enough radios in forward area. When you talk about a station coming in, they say `what's the good of a station if you don't have a radio?' I think they have something there. It hurts me to think what even 1,000 radios would mean in Manila right now."(19)

Peterson found similar shortages in station equipment. On Saipan, the station had to borrow a short-wave receiver from the OWI and on Guam, one from the base communications office. He wrote, "Seems a shame we force stations in the field to chisel and borrow equipment that should be automatic issue. The greatest thing in the world to get a new station off to a flying start is to send in the station completely equipped from quonset to typewriter."(20)

Peterson undoubtedly expected too much from AFRS and the Armed Forces. Shortages were to be expected as the military prepared for the final assault on Japan. Typical of military creativity, local commanders were continually providing the resources to upgrade facilities. To be sure, some stations remained rather primitive.

George Verner was back from New Guinea after two years working at the Jungle Network station. He recalled how the staff put together the studio: "We fold Army Blankets and wrap them around the walls, inside and out. On the ceiling, we use an open parachute, both for ornamental effect and to improve the acoustics."(21)

By the time Peterson arrived on Guam, most stations had acquired or were in the process of building permanent facilities. The Guam station had completed plans for new facilities and construction had begun on an auditorium for 150-person studios, and offices. The work was a combined effort of the navy SeaBees and Japanese prisoners. The military police provided security.(22)

In due course, most of the stations obtained adequate facilities such as the one Peterson found at Ulithi. He located the well-camouflaged building "about 200-feet off the road... an ideal location for a radio station. That is, it's *ideal* if you don't mind having a fuel dump on one side of you and an ammunition dump on the other!"(23)

PROGRAMMING IN THE TROPICS

As Chief of Programming, Peterson always concerned himself with what the troops were hearing on the radio. At Eniwetok, for example, he found that the nine most popular shows were: "Command Performance," "G.I. Journal," "Mail Call," "Jubilee," "Personal Album," "G.I. Jive," "Yank Swing Session," "Downbeat" and "Melody Round-Up." Another popular show in the Jungle Network area was "Uncle Efrim." It was locally-produced and broadcast during the noon hour at Hollandia. A takeoff on the popular stateside character known as Uncle Ezra, Efrim would ad lib and play country and western records daily for fifteen minutes.(24)

AFRS KEEPS ON GROWING

An ever-growing number of outlets received the local programs and the AFRS package. From 120 stations in December, 1943, the AFRS network grew to 154 stations by March, 1945. Outlets covered all corners of the world including the Middle East, Europe, North Africa, the China-Burma-India Theater, Alaska, the Caribbean, Central America, and the South Pacific. In addition, AFRS operated 143 public address systems overseas and the Bedside Network in veterans' hospitals throughout the United States. Each outlet received the AFRS packet of transcriptions containing an average of 126 separate programs either specially-produced by the Hollywood headquarters or decommercialized shows.

AFRS was a broadcast operation that provided something for everyone. Spencer Allen, the Chief of the Mosquito Network, responded to a question of why AFRS catered to mass tastes when it might give the men "better things." "Actually, we're probably more highbrow than the average station back home. Nonetheless, we don't forget that our servicemen are a cross-section. They want Benny and Hope, Harry James and Kay Kyser, John Charles Thomas and the NBC Symphony. They want them in just about the same proportion your listeners in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Plum Tree Crossing back home want them. So we give it to them in that proportion - otherwise, we're going to lose some customers and Tokyo Rose will gain some."(25)

By September, 1945, the American Forces landed in Yokohama. The Allies arrested Tokyo Rose, and AFRS reached to all corners of the world. It had carried out its mission better than anyone would've thought possible back when Tom Lewis received his mandate to create a military radio operation in May, 1942. Observing AFRS in operation during his four-month tour, Austin Peterson could not contain his enthusiasm. He wrote to Lewis, "I swore when I got back, I wouldn't use the phrase 'You're doing a grand job' but damn if they aren't. If you are to be truthful, what else can you say? All you have to do is see what radio means to men out here and it makes it all worthwhile."(26)

POST-WAR RADIO

The creativity found in AFRS-originated programming marked the high point in radio broadcast history. The end of the war by no means signified the end of Armed Forces Radio. Some would say that Armed Forces Radio performed its most important work during the immediate postwar period.

In such places as Mindanao, the AFRS station broadcast special instructions to Japanese still hiding in the nearby hills. For two hours each day, American-born Japanese instructed Japanese soldiers how to surrender and assured them that the Americans would comply with all rules of the Geneva Conventions. To insure the soldiers would be able to hear the messages, the Army dropped radios by parachute to selected regions. Included in the packages were operating instructions in Japanese and information on how to tune to the station's frequency.(27)

Convincing the Japanese that everything would be all right was not a new technique for AFRS. Stations had been educating and informing audiences about health, careers, savings bonds and many other things for almost three years. When it was over, AFRS faced a new command information job - preparing the troops for the transition from military back to civilians life. Even before the day of victory, AFRS prepared a series of programs explaining how troops would be discharged. Radio became the vehicle for explaining to others who remained, and to new troops arriving, their importance as the occupying force.

Back home in the Los Angeles Headquarters, the writers, producers and technicians all tried to get out of uniform as quickly as possible. Entertainers lost interest in contributing their talents. As Martin Work took command from Lewis in October, 1945, he faced the problems of maintaining product quality while cutting back on original programming.

While the post-war period both in Hollywood and around the world taxed their creativity, once again AFRS came through. Operations of the Armed Forces Radio Service continued without interruption.

However, like the troops they served, AFRS found itself in transition.

NOTES - CHAPTER 14

(1) Tom Lewis, *Victory Through Air Power*, February 6, 1945.
(2) *Time*, July 17, 1944.
(3) Spencer Allen, Letter to AFRTS, February 1, 1984, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, May 7, 1944, Pt 3, p 71.
(4) Ibid.
(5) *Broadcasting*, April 30, 1945.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Ibid; *Time*, July 17, 1944.
(8) Allen, *Broadcasting*.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Ibid.
(11) *They loved us in New Zealand!* The Mosquito Network, Information Education Section, South Pacific Base Command, March 10, 1945.
(12) Major Ted Sherdeman to Col Tom Lewis, August 31, 1944.
(13) Ibid.
(14) Ibid.
(15) Ibid.
(16) Ibid.
(17) Austin Peterson, *Hitchhiker on AFRS Road to Tokyo*, A collection of letters, n.d.[December 194 - March 1945], cited hereafter as Peterson.
(18) Peterson.
(19) Peterson.
(20) Peterson.
(21) Hollywood Radio Studios, Jungle Stations Contrasted, *Citizen News*, February 27, 1945.
(22) Peterson.
(23) Peterson.
(24) Peterson.
(25) Spencer Allen, *Broadcasting*, April 30, 1945.
(26) Peterson.
(27) Armed Forces Radio Service, *AFRS Playback*, October 22, 1945, p 9.